

The consequences of Syriza's betrayal: From terms of surrender to terms of occupation

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Meeting late into Sunday night, euro zone heads of government issued new ultimatums to Greece that would effectively strip the country of its sovereignty and turn it into an economic colony of the German banks.

The German government has been the most aggressive in insisting that either the Greek parliament pass a series of laws by Wednesday night imposing an array of onerous measures or Greece will be expelled from the common European currency. That would likely precipitate an immediate collapse of the Greek economy.

A draft statement by euro zone officials listing their conditions for initiating talks on a new bailout includes: higher budget surplus targets and automatic spending cuts if these targets are missed; more sweeping cuts in pensions; higher regressive sales taxes; more extensive privatizations of public institutions; the gutting of protections against layoffs; the imposition of restrictions on collective bargaining and the right to strike; and the scrapping of laws passed since Syriza came to power that "have not been agreed with the institutions [the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund] and run counter to the program commitments."

Another demand discussed at the meeting was for the Greek government to place €50 billion in public assets in a fund controlled by an outside firm, to be used to pay down the country's debt. That sum is approximately equal to the size of the loan Greece is requesting from the EU's European Stability Mechanism.

Media reports on the closed-door meeting made clear the humiliation delivered to Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and that what is being demanded is the reduction of the country to the status of a Third World colony. *Bloomberg* headlined its report "EU Demands Complete Capitulation From Tsipras." The *Guardian*, in an article headlined "Greek crisis: surrender fiscal sovereignty in return for bailout, Merkel tells Tsipras," cited a senior EU

official as calling the treatment of Tsipras an "exercise in mental waterboarding."

A separate *Guardian* comment characterized the EU's conditions for initiating negotiations on a new bailout as "stay on our terms or walk. You decide." The author called the conditions being attached to a new Greek bailout "beyond harsh."

Germany and the major EU powers are treating Greece as a conquered and occupied country. They are seizing the country's wealth and imposing dictatorial control over its economic and social policies. They are demanding iron-clad guarantees that cuts in jobs, pensions and social services that have already slashed working class living standards in half and shattered the country's health care system be intensified, with no end in sight.

It is difficult to quantify the level of suffering these policies will impose. They will mean mass destitution, disease and death. Greece is being turned into a laboratory for imposing in peacetime the type of conditions previously associated with war.

The aim is to make Greece an object lesson and precedent for imposing similar conditions on the working class across Europe. The attack is being led by an imperialist power, Germany, that invaded Greece three quarters of a century ago and killed hundreds of thousands of its citizens.

The response of Tsipras is to compound his capitulation. Even as he was being publicly flayed by EU leaders, he pleaded for an "honest compromise." He and his finance minister, Euclid Tsakalotos, reportedly agreed to push for legislation by Wednesday night, as demanded, to implement the new list of EU demands.

Syriza's abject surrender ranks among the most miserable betrayals of the working class in history. Just eight days ago, Greek voters, in a referendum called by Tsipras, overwhelmingly rejected new austerity measures demanded by the European Union. Tsipras and his cabinet

immediately repudiated this popular mandate and four days later submitted a proposal to impose even more savage cuts (worth €13 billion) than the €9 billion in cuts rejected by the Greek masses.

Now they are preparing to go even further, imposing deeper cuts and giving German imperialism and the banks veto power over Greek government policy and effective control of the economy.

Tsipras' actions are determined by the class interests of the Greek bourgeoisie and the privileged layers of the upper-middle class represented by Syriza. For them, the massive "no" vote in the referendum meant there was no alternative to capitulation to German and European imperialism. Tsipras saw the referendum result—which he neither anticipated nor desired—as an expression of a growing radicalization of the working class, mobilizing behind it broader layers of the poor and oppressed.

For the social layers represented by Syriza, the prospect of a mass independent movement of the working class is a thousand times more dangerous than the threats from Germany and the other European powers.

Syriza's betrayal has not only landed Greece in an even more nightmarish economic position, it has generated enormous confusion in the working class—a dangerous situation that will only strengthen the fascist Golden Dawn party and facilitate preparations by the military for a possible coup.

The *Wall Street Journal* wrote on Sunday: "A week ago, Greeks partied in the streets after voting to resoundingly reject terms of a new European bailout. On Sunday, those same streets were filled with a dazed and confused populace struggling to understand how they were now faced with swallowing a deal even tougher than the one they had just snubbed."

The newspaper cited a 37-year-old employee at a coffee shop who said, "People are starting to lose their minds. I'm so confused myself... I voted for 'no,' but in fact it meant 'yes.' Is this some kind of joke?"

Meanwhile, Syriza is reported to be "disintegrating" and Tsipras has lost his parliamentary majority. He is expected to expel dissident forces from his party and enter into talks for a new "national unity" government with the openly pro-austerity parties he replaced last January, or call new elections.

Syriza's policies all along have combined illusions, petty maneuvers and bad faith. To the extent Tsipras and his advisers had any strategy, it was to make appeals to the ruling classes of Europe for token concessions. Each time they hit a brick wall, they retreated, and each retreat

only encouraged the imperialist powers to demand more.

Tsipras' claim that he has acted to protect the Greek people from an even worse catastrophe is a lie. He is not negotiating to save the Greek people, but to save the Greek bourgeoisie. What is being demanded is more or less the suicide of Greek society to save the interests of the Greek elite at the expense of the Greek masses.

The interests of the Greek working class require a different strategy. To defeat the European Union and the banks, the Greek working class must be mobilized against imperialism's fifth column within Greece—the Greek bourgeoisie. This means a break with Syriza and all other representatives of Greek capital and the development of an independent political movement for a workers' government based on a socialist program.

All negotiations with the EU, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank must be halted. The Greek debt must be repudiated. The assets of the banks, the major corporations and the wealthiest elements of society must be seized and placed under the democratic control of the working class.

A direct appeal should be made to the workers of Europe and the United States to come to the defense of the Greek working class and prosecute their own struggles against their own ruling classes.

Syriza's betrayal and its horrific consequences make clear that the only realistic policy for the working class is one that is based on a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist system.



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